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"THE FAITH"

Recently, during one of those social functions connected with Shoa services and the celebration of the Independence of the State of Israel, I met an interesting young rabbi of Hungarian descent.

If it weren't for his scholarly glasses and a beard, he could have been easily mistaken for a basketball player, because he was well over 6'3" or 6'4" tall. Talking further with him I discovered that the rabbi, just like my own son, was an attorney at law and a PhD (philosophy) to boot.

The rabbi wanted to know if I was ever in a concentration camp? "Luckily for me rabbi I wasn't, however, I had the honor to serve with the 1st Polish Army a part of the 2nd White-Russian Front." His second question to me was: "Where are you from?" I replied with pride: "From Drohobycz in Galicia." It seems that Jews in general or rabbis in particular like to ask questions, because he asked me a third question:

"Is Drohobycz far from Stanislawow?". Being Jewish myself I answered the question with a question: "Why do you ask rabbi?" "You see, yesterday I officiated at an unusual burial ceremony of a Polish Jew from the town of Stanislawow. He was 84 years old. Nobody should die younger."

"What is so unusual about a man dying at 84? That is a ripe old age, isn't it rabbi?". "What was so unusual was his request to be buried in the same striped, pajama-like suit in which he was liberated, rather than the "tachrihem" the traditional burial shrouds of the Orthodox Jews."

"That was a strange request, don't you think so rabbi?"

"Come to think of it, it wasn't so strange after all. Do you have a minute, mister?"

"Yes rabbi, I'm listening. Please do call me George."

"OK George. This Jew from Stanislawow, Abraham Zygielbojm, during the war lost his wife and a three year old son. He however, by some miracle, known only to God, survived four concentration camps and was liberated in Buchenwald. After the war he spent 3 years in a D.P. Camp Feldafing in Bavaria, waiting for his visa to the States. Arriving in New York City with $8 in his pockets he promptly landed a job as a cutter at a tie factory on 26th Street in Manhattan, owned by Mr. Spiegel also from Stanislawow. Cutting layers and layers of fabrics to get the absolute maximum of ties was very hard work, as I found out much later. He worked in that factory well past his retirement age of 65. If I'm not mistaken, he worked there till he was 70 and that is when he moved to Florida and joined my congregation. I do know for a fact that he never remarried, although many widows were after him. Every free moment he spent in a library or playing chess with the new Russian immigrants, always immaculately dressed and always wearing a neck tie even on the hottest days. Needless to say he has never missed a morning or evening prayer. Working hard all his life and not being a spendthrift, he saved some money which he donated to various Jewish charitable institutions. I don't have to tell you George, George isn't it? How many of those organizations do exist?"

"Didn't he have any relatives at all?" I interrupted the rabbi. "He had a ~~son of his~~ cousin's son, on his mother's side in Israel. But the boy , oh I shouldn't call a captain in the

Israeli Army a boy, was killed during the Yom Kippur War in 73."

"What a pity. So what has happened to Mr. Ztygielbojm?" "Well, all those years that Abe, I used to call him Abe, worked with textiles, must have affected his lungs. What he thought was "just" T.B. was cancer. He was in for a tough time. One day he showed up in my office and gave me a copy of his testament, naming me the executor of his last will. It was all legal drawn by a lawyer, another member of my congregation and duly witnessed. He divided his money to the last "grosz" or should I say cent. The recipients were his "regular" charities including our synagogue, but this time there was also money for Cancer Research and a sum of $5.000 for his steady cleaning lady turned nurse-practitioner a certain Medalaine LeDuc of Haiti. The most important request in that will was to be buried in his "clean and well pressed" (those were his own words) concentration camp inmate's striped uniform." For the love of God, why do you want to do that?" I asked him over and over again."

"Rebeniu! He always called me Rebeniu in Yiddish. You see I'm going to be in front of the Highest Judge and I've not always obeyed His commandments, I ate non-kosher and did not always behave myself like a good Jew should. So if God, may His name be praised for all the eternity, will throw my sins on one side of the scale, I'll just put my striped uniform on the other scale and who do you think will win, Rebeniu?"

"There isn't a shadow of doubt in my mind, that you Mr. Abraham Zygielbojm will win.

You will go straight to the Garden of Eden, where you'll meet y our wife and son."

"Nu, Rebeniu, you see what I'm try to do? This is my very last chance to be reunited with my Roisele and my Shloimale."

The rabbi stopped talking lost in his thoughts.....and I in mine.

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